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ABSTRACT

Publishers of basal reading series claim that beginning reading materials must contain primarily high frequency words and that new words must be introduced gradually. Inherent in their argument is the position that reading is based on the student's ability to recognize words and that short, phonetically regular words are easier to read. To examine this position, a study compared first-grade students' reading of a traditional basal story from a skills type basal series to their reading of student-dictated stories. The Spache Readability Formula was used to determine the readability levels of all stories. The Goodman and Burke Miscue analysis procedure was used to analyze oral reading performance, and story retellings were used to assess comprehension. Results showed that the basal story miscues at the sentence level were semantically and syntactically acceptable, but were coupled with meaning change. The interrelatedness of syntax, semantics, and meaning change on the story level was ignored by students as a basis for correcting miscues to maintain meaning. On the other hand, student-dictated story miscues produced interrelationships that allowed little meaning change and no loss in comprehension. Although they were confronting a more sophisticated vocabulary and more complicated sentence structure, the children used more efficient strategies when reading the dictated stories. (HOD)

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STUDENT AUTHORSHIP AND READING: THE JOY OF LITERACY

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This study, using first-grade students, examined the strategies students used when reading two types of materials--basal and student-authored. The children used more efficient strategies and had better comprehension when reading student-authored stories.

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RUNNING HEAD: THE JOY OF LITERACY
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Student Authorship and Reading: The Joy of Literacy

Children enter school with a good command of their language and a strong sense of its semantic and syntactic structure. In addition, they possess a treasure of knowledge concerning print and its function in communication. Consequently, learning to read ought to be a joyous, successful experience for children. Yet some students find learning to read a difficult and frustrating task. Perhaps this is because many beginning reading programs break the natural, meaning-based rhythm that has brought children success as users of language.

During the preschool period, a pattern is developed of associating meaning and experiences with language and communication. Donaldson (1978) warns that this pattern must be maintained as children begin formal study of how language is used in reading. Further, she posits that the syntactical structure of reading materials must not be "alien

to the grammatical forms of the child's speech" (Donaldson, 1978, p. 101). These "home-rooted" grammatical forms follow Allen's (1976) philosophy that beginning reading instruction must start with the "child's" language. Therefore it would seem that beginning reading materials should reflect the grammatical structure and sophistication of children's language.

Nevertheless, research on preprimer basals shows that wide differences exist between the language of children and the language used in basal textbooks (Giles, 1966; Moe, 1974; Sampson, 1982). The language of children is more sophisticated than the language of the basals; consequently, the exclusive use of basals offers limited opportunity for either vocabulary growth or the development of an appreciation of the joy that reading can bring.

Publishers of basal reading series, however, claim that beginning materials must contain primarily high frequency words and that new words must be introduced gradually. Inherent in their argument is the position that reading is based on the student's ability to recognize words and that short, phonetically-regular words are easier to read.

THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine the publishers' position by comparing the students' reading of a basal story to the students' reading of student-authored stories. Although student-authored material might be expected to reflect language more sophisticated than that used in basal readers, we hypothesized that students would handle

student-authored language more successfully than the language of basal readers.

The materials used included a traditional basal story from a skills type basal series and student-dictated stories. The basal story, "Buzzy and the Pencil," was selected from Balloons, the Houghton Mifflin second preprimer. Each of the students dictated a story to the researcher; therefore, nine stories were created. These stories were based on a fantasy or an experience and were written in the students' home-rooted language; no grammatical or structural changes were made. The Spache Readability Formula was used to determine the readability level of all the stories. The basal story had a 1.8 readability level; whereas, the student-dictated stories had readability levels ranging from 2.4 to 4.0.

The subjects were nine first-grade students who attended a rural Northeast Texas public school and were reading on the second-preprimer level. Three visits were made with each student. Each child dictated a story on the first visit. During the next two visits each child read the basal story and his/her dictated story.

The Goodman and Burke miscue analysis procedure (1972) was used to analyze oral reading performance. Story retellings were used to assess comprehension. The students were told to pretend that a good friend had entered the room after the story was read, and they were to tell the story to the friend. Events mentioned in the retellings were compared with events in the basal story and dictated stories to obtain a percentage of match. The retellings were also analyzed as new texts and examined for inclusion of an event, a plan, and a consequence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The miscue data were examined to determine what patterns existed in student responses to text. The basal-story miscues revealed semantically and syntactically acceptable miscues at the sentence level, but they were coupled with meaning change. The interrelatedness of syntax, semantics, and meaning change on the story level was ignored by students as a basis for correcting miscues to maintain meaning.

On the other hand, student-dictated story miscues produced interrelationships which showed little meaning change and no loss in comprehension. When necessary, readers corrected miscues in pursuit of meaning.

Every story was judged to be a complete episode. Only one child did not retell a complete episode for her dictated story. Two children, however, omitted complete episodes in the basal story.

The number of events to be recalled was greater, with one exception, in the dictated stories (range: 5 to 12 events , $\bar{X} = 8.89$) than in the basal story (6 events). Yet, the children had better comprehension of their dictated stories than the basal story as demonstrated by a higher percentage of recalled events--80 percent as compared to 70 percent, respectively.

CONCLUSIONS

In this study, we compared the miscues and comprehension of the children when they read their dictated stories and the basal story. The dictated stories contained more sophisticated vocabulary and more complicated sentence structure than the basal story; however, the

children used more efficient strategies when reading the dictated stories.

When reading a self-authored story, the child encounters success in both the affective and cognitive domains. The child is involved aesthetically, and the message has more meaning. What story could hold more beauty for a child than one that rings with the melody of his or her own experiences and language patterns?

We found that young readers processed print more proficiently when the reading material was interesting and meaningful. Yet many children continue to receive reading instruction exclusively from dull, repetitious materials that are on a low readability level. Because the students were successful in reading their dictated stories (which had readability levels ranging from 2.4 to 4.0, $\bar{X}$=2.8), this study demonstrated that children may profit from reading high-interest instructional materials which far exceed the readability level of their assigned basal.

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